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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BANGKOK 000362

SIPDIS

STATE FOR EAP/MLS, NSC FOR WALTON

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [TH](#)

SUBJECT: THAILAND: EAP DAS MARCIEL ENGAGES RED-SHIRT
LEADERS ON DOMESTIC POLITICAL ISSUES

REF: A. BANGKOK 340 (CRACKS IN RED-SHIRT CAMP)
[1](#)B. BANGKOK 227 (DEMOCRATS OPPOSE CHARTER CHANGES)
[1](#)C. BANGKOK 149 (RED-SHIRT LEADERS TELL GOALS)

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Classified By: DCM JAMES F. ENTWISTLE, REASON 1.4 (B) AND (D)

[1](#)1. (U) Summary: EAP Deputy Assistant Secretary Scot Marciel met separately with the top strategists of the United Front for Democracy Against Dictatorship (UDD, or "red-shirts") and a group which included PM deputy SecGen and Acting Government Spokesman Panitan on February 10 to discuss the state of play in Thai politics in the run-up to the red-shirt's promised "final battle" to oust the Abhisit government. Chief UDD leader Veera Musikapong reiterated the standard red-shirt list of complaints against the government, along with demands for new elections and a reversion to the 1997 Constitution. He also indicated that the red-shirts will now likely schedule their main protest after the expected February 26 court decision on fugitive former PM Thaksin's frozen assets. For his part, Panitan expressed the government's resolve to take prudent measures to contain possible violence by pro-Thaksin actors in the coming weeks. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (C) Comment: The delay in the red-shirt plans for their promised massive anti-government rally appears to reflect disarray in the wake of the public disagreement between pro-Thaksin figures over tactics, with UDD core leaders at odds with pro-Thaksin agitators MGEN Panlop and MGEN Khattiya, aka Seh Daeng (refs A, C). The disagreements and delay do not, however, change the potential for mass protests and violence, only shift the time window for concern. End Comment.

RED AGENDA THE SAME

[1](#)3. (C) EAP DAS Scot Marciel met with core UDD leaders Veera Musikapong and Jaran Ditapichai, as well as UDD deputy international coordinator Sean Boonprakong, February 10 to discuss the red-shirt movement's plans for holding what they claimed would be peaceful demonstrations to oust the government headed by Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva. Speaking before the arrival of Veera, Jaran said he personally expected about 400,000 people in their next "final battle," though Veera aspired to 1 million. The primary goal

was to oust the government; the wider goal was to eliminate the "aristocracy" holding the country back. DAS Marciel asked how UDD leaders planned to avoid the violence that plagued the April 2009 red-shirt protests; Jaran vowed that if the RTG did not resort to violence, neither would the red-shirts.

¶4. (C) Veera reviewed the recent spate of small, concentrated UDD demonstrations in the past week: the Defense Ministry and Army HQ to protest a potential coup; the Office of Attorney General and Police HQ to protest lack of progress against the yellow-shirt take-overs of the airport and Government House in 2008 and land violation cases by Privy Councilors. The primary "double standards" theme, combined with the need to dissolve parliament and restore the 1997 Constitution, echoed Veera's remarks to the Ambassador in January (REF C). Veera claimed Thaksin's frozen assets case was no more important than the other UDD grievances, though he later acknowledged the timing of the major protest would hinge on the result of the February 26 decision. Regardless of how the court ruled on Thaksin's assets, he vowed the UDD would continue to pressure PM Abhisit to dissolve parliament and call new elections.

GOVERNMENT FEAR OF VIOLENCE UNFOUNDED

¶5. (C) DAS Marciel asked Veera to explain the recent news about plans to create a pro-Thaksin "people's army" (REF A). The UDD espoused peaceful means of changing the government, Veera stressed, while admitting that pro-Thaksin figures Panlop and Seh Daeng made their unfortunate announcement after meeting with Thaksin in Dubai. Puea Thai party chairman Chavalit Yongchaiyut and UDD leaders distanced

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themselves from the idea and agitators. The presence of two high-profile UDD figures, Arisman and Rambo Isaan, in the Dubai session with Panlop, Seh Daeng, and Thaksin had led to a heated UDD meeting February 9, Veera claimed he had chastised the two UDD members and told them that if they advocated violence they would have to leave the UDD.

¶6. (C) Veera alleged the government was trying to paint the red-shirt movement as non-peaceful to create a pretext to crush it; the UDD would rise or fall on its ability to remain peaceful, he stated. Referencing the April violence, he claimed pro-government "blue shirts" had instigated violence at the ASEAN Summit in Pattaya, burned the busses and threatened to blow up natural gas trucks in Bangkok, and that the government-controlled media and stifled evidence of such provocations. He expressed hope that if the UDD achieved its goal of 1 million protesters, the government would back away from confrontation and accede to red-shirt demands for new elections.

U.S. CONCERNED ABOUT THAILAND

¶7. (C) DAS Marciel emphasized that the American people cared deeply about the Thai people and Thailand. We understood the country faced deep internal disagreement, but this was a matter for the Thai people to resolve themselves. The U.S. would be careful not to intervene, supported the right of people to demonstrate and express their views freely, but were concerned about the potential for violence, including military intervention. The perception of Thailand from afar was one of worry after four years of impasse; over time, this situation hurt Thailand's image and interests.

PANITAN, OTHERS CONCERNED ABOUT RED PLANS

¶8. (C) In a group lunch dominated by discussion foreign policy issues (septel), PM deputy SecGen and Acting Government Spokesman Panitan Wattanayakorn shared his

perspectives on the government's efforts to prepare for the upcoming red-shirt protests. Repeating allegations that made headlines in the February 10 Thai media, Panitan claimed that three pro-Thaksin intermediaries recently received huge monetary infusions to fund the protests, "one woman and two businessmen-politicians." He claimed the hard core pro-Thaksin agitators were ready for action before and after the expected court decision, and regardless of the outcome. That was the reason why the authorities had begun preparations to control the situation, including plans for multiple road blocks in Bangkok and actions in certain provincial districts.

19. (C) Human Rights Watch's Sunai Phasuk expressed concern about the situation in Chiang Mai in particular, suggesting violence might break out there before Bangkok in the immediate aftermath of the February 26 court decision, were it to go against Thaksin. Sunai fingered red community radio DJ "Aom" as particularly effective at instigating violent-prone crowds on as short notice as 20-30 minutes, along with Chiang Mai 51 red-shirt leader Patcharawat. He noted how red-shirts had recently surrounded and started attacking the house of former Senator Chirmsak, as well as the late 2008 incident in which a red mob had lynched the father of a yellow-shirt community radio station owner in front of the station.

DAS Marciel did not clear this cable.
JOHN